

# Barbara Hepworth

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**Jocelyn Barbara Hepworth** DBE (10 January 1903 – 20 May 1975) was a major British sculptor and artist of the twentieth century



photo of Barbara Hepworth 1966,  
by Erling Mandelmann

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## Quotes of Barbara Hepworth

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sorted chronologically after date of the quotes of Barbara Hepworth

### 1932 - 1946

- The sculptor carves because he must. He needs the concrete form of stone and wood for the expression of his idea and experience, and when the idea forms the material is found at once. ... I have always preferred direct carving to modelling because I like the resistance of the hard material and feel happier working that way. Carving is more adapted to the expression of the accumulative idea of experience and clay to the visual attitude. An idea for carving must be clearly formed before starting and sustained during the long process of working; also, there are all the beauties of several hundreds of different stones and woods, and the idea must be in harmony with the qualities of each one carved; that harmony comes with the discovery of the most direct way of carving each material according to its nature.
  - quote from an extract of 'Barbara Hepworth - *the Sculptor carves because he must* The Studio, London, vol. 104, December 1932, p. 332
- I do not want to make a stone horse that is trying to and cannot smell the air. How lovely is the horse's sensitive nose, the dog's moving ears and deep eyes; but to me these are not stone forms and the love of them and the emotion can only be expressed in more abstract terms. I do not want to make a machine that cannot fulfil its essential purpose; but to make exactly the right relation of masses, a living thing in stone, to express my awareness and thought of these things.
  - Quote of Hepworth in her text: 'Unit One', 1934; as cited in *Voicing our visions, - Writings by women artists*, ed. by Mara R. Witzling, Universe New York 1991, p. 278
- Carving is interrelated masses conveying an emotion; a perfect relationship between the mind and the colour, light and weight which is the stone, made by the hand which feels. It must be so essentially sculpture that it can exist in no other way, something completely the right size but which has growth, something still and yet having movement, so very quiet and yet with a real vitality
  - Extract from Hepworth's statement in Unit One, as cited in *The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Herbert Read, London, 1934, p. 19



Hepworth, 1935: 'Discs in Echelon',  
bronze sculpture - cast later: 1958

- A constructive work is an embodiment of freedom itself, and is unconsciously perceived, even by those who are consciously against it. The desire to live is the strongest universal emotion, it springs from the depths of our unconscious sensibility – and the desire to give life is our most potent, constructive, conscious expression of this intuition.
  - In: 'Circle', 1937; as quoted in *Voicing our visions, - Writings by women artists*, ed. by Mara R. Witzling, Universe New York 1991, p. 279
- He [Giovanni Ardini, Italian master-carver] opened up a new vista for me of the quality of form, light, and colour contained in the Mediterranean conception of carving.
  - Hepworth's quote in: 'Approach to Sculpture', *The Studio*, London, October 1946, Vol. CXXXII, no. 643, p. 97
  - Hepworth is here referring to Giovanni Ardini's remark that "marble changes colour under different people's hands"

### 'The Studio 132:643', (1946)

**Quotes of Barbara Hepworth, from: 'The Studio 132:643', 1946; as cited in *Voicing our visions, - Writings by women artists* ed. by Mara R. Witzling, Universe New York 1991,**

- I have always been interested in oval or ovoid shapes. The first carvings were simple realistic oval forms of the human head or of a bird. Gradually my interest grew in more abstract values – the weight, poise and curvature of the ovoid as a basic form. The carving and piercing of such a form seems to open up an infinite variety of continuous curves in the third dimension, changing in accordance with the contours of the original ovoid and with the degree of penetration of the material. Here is a sufficient field for exploration to last a lifetime..
  - p. 279
- Before I start carving the idea must be almost complete. I say 'almost' because the really important thing seems to be the sculptor's ability to let his intuition guide him over the gap between conception and realization without compromising the integrity of the original idea; the point being that the material has vitality – it resists and makes demands..
  - p. 279
- I have been deeply interested during the last ten years in the use of colour with form. I have applied oil colour – white, grey and blues of different degrees of tone...I have been very influenced by the natural colour and luminosity in stones and woods and the change in colour as light travels over the surface contours. When I pierced the material tight through a great change seemed to take place in the concavities from which direct light was excluded. From this experience my use of colour developed.
  - p. 279
- I have gained very great inspiration from the Cornish land- and seascape, the horizontal line of the sea and the quality of light and colour which reminds me of the Mediterranean light and colour which so excites one's sense of form; and first and last there is the human figure which in the country becomes a free and moving part of a greater whole. This relationship between figure and landscape is vitally important to me. I cannot feel it in a city
  - p. 280



Hepworth, 1937-38: 'Pierced Hemisphere II', hoptonwood stone on portland stone base; - quote of Hepworth, 1932: *'The sculptor carves because he must. He needs the concrete form of stone and wood for the expression of his idea and experience, and when the idea forms the material is found at once'*



Hepworth, 1938: 'Forms in Echelon', wood sculpture

### 1947 - 1960

- A chance remark by Ardini, an Italian master carver whom I met there [in Rome], that 'marble changes colour under different people's hands' made me decide immediately that it was not dominance which one had to attain over material, but an understanding, almost a kind of persuasion, and above all greater co-ordination between head and hand. This thought has recurred again and again ever since - and has developed my greatest interests; the reason why people both move differently and stand differently in direct response to changed surroundings; the unconscious grouping of people when they are working together, producing a spatial movement which approximates to the structure of spirals in shells or rhythms in crystal structure; the meaning of the spaces between forms, or the shape of the displacement of forms in space, which in themselves have a most precise significance. All these responses spring from a factual and tactile approach to the object.

- Extract from Barbara Hepworth: *Carvings and Drawings* (from Chapter 1: The excitement of discovering the nature of carving, 1903-1930), with an introduction by Herbert Read, London, 1952
- There is an inside and an outside to every form. When they are in special accord, as for instance a nut in its shell or a child in the womb, or in the structure of shells or crystals, or when one senses the architecture of bones in the human figure, then I am most drawn to the effect of light. Every shadow cast by the sun from an ever-varying angle reveals the harmony of the inside to outside. Light gives full play to our tactile perceptions through the experience of our eyes, and the vitality of forms is revealed by the interplay between space and volume

- Extract from Barbara Hepworth: *Carvings and Drawings* (from Chapter 1: The excitement of discovering the nature of carving, 1903-1930), with an introduction by Herbert Read, London, 1952
- Sculpture, to me, is primitive, religious, passionate, and magical.
  - Quote in Hepworth's letter to: Bram Hammacher, February 1955, cited in *Barbara Hepworth*, B. Hammacher, (first published 1968), revised edition, London, 1987, p. 117
- Art at the moment is thrilling. The work of the artist today springs from innate impulses towards life, towards growth - impulses whose rhythms and structures have to do with the power and insistence of life. [...] In the past, when sculpture was based on the human figure, we knew this structure well. But today we are concerned with structures in an infinitely wider sense, in a universal sense. Our thoughts can either lead us to life and continuity or [...] the way to annihilation. That is why it is so important that we find our complete sense of continuity backwards and forwards in this new world of forms and values. I see the present development in art as something opposed to any materialistic, anti-human or mechanistic direction of mind.

- Quote from a conversation with J.P. Hodin, 18 August 1959; in an extract from J.P. Hodin, Barbara Hepworth, London, 1961, *Two Conversations with Barbara Hepworth: 'Art and Life' and 'The Ethos of Sculpture'*, pp. 23-24
- Sculpture communicates an immediate sense of life - you can feel the pulse of it. It is perceived, above all, by the sense of touch which is our earliest sensation; and touch gives us a sense of living contact and security. [...] That has nothing to do with the question of perfection, or harmony or purity, or escapism. It lies far deeper; it is the primitive instinct which allows man to live fully with all his perceptions active and alert, and in the calm acceptance of the balance of life and death. In its insistence on elementary values, sculpture is perhaps more important today than before because life's continuity is threatened and this has given us a sense of unbalance.
  - Quote from a conversation with J.P. Hodin, 28 August 1959; extract from J.P. Hodin, Barbara Hepworth, London, 1961, *Two Conversations with Barbara Hepworth: 'Art and Life' and 'The Ethos of Sculpture'*, pp. 23-24
- Light and space ... are the sculptor's materials as much as wood or stone ... I feel that I can relate my work more easily, in the open air, to the climate and the landscape.
  - In: Interview in *Dialogues on Art*, Edouard Roditi, London, 1960, pp. 91-92



Hepworth, 1951: 'Contrapunctal Forms', stone sculpture



Hepworth, 1953: 'Monolith-Empyrean', stone sculpture



## 1961 - 1975

- [the 1960's began] with a feeling of tremendous liberation, because I at last had space and money and time to work on a much bigger scale.
  - Interview with Alan Bowness, published in Bowness (ed.) *The complete sculpture of Barbara Hepworth 1960–69* London, 1971, p. 7
- It is easy now to communicate with people through abstraction, and particularly so in sculpture. Since the whole body reacts to its presence, people become themselves a living part of the whole.
  - Interview in *The Studio* (1962)
- The Acropolis – the spaces between the columns – the depth of flutings to touch – the breadth, weight and volume – the magnificence of a single marble bole up-ended -. The passionate warm colour of the marble and all-pervading philosophic proportion and space.
- Ascended Kynthos alone, the cave of Apollo – half-way magnificent and majestic. A pool with fine fig trees nearby full of giant (sacred?) toads – leaping and barking. Also green frogs.
- Saw a magnificent Koros – tall, fierce and passionate bigger than life size – in the Museum. A heavenly work – the backs and buttocks in relation to the hip and waist – an inspiration. I thought the fragment of leg and calf (attached below the knee) was falsely attributed.
  - Quote from Barbara Hepworth, in her 'Greek diary' - 1965; J.P. Hodin, *European Critic*; London: Corby Adams and MacKay
- I cannot write anything about landscape without writing about the human figure and the human spirit inhabiting the landscape, for me, the whole art sculpture is a fusion of these two element – the balance of sensation and the evocation of man in his universe. Every work in sculpture is either a figure I see, or a sensation I have, whether in Ōrkshire, Cornwall or Greece, or the Mediterranean.
  - 'Studio International 171' – June 1966; as quoted in *Voicing our visions, - Writings by women artists* ed. by Mara R. Witzling, Universe New York 1991, p. 280
- Sculpture is, in the twentieth century a wide field of experience, with many facets of symbol and material and individual calligraphy But in all these varied and exciting extensions of our experience we always come back tot the fact that we are human beings of such and such a size, biologically the same as primitive man, and that it is through drawing and observing, or observing and drawing, that we equate our bodies with our landscape.
  - *Studio International 171*– June 1966, p. 280
- Whenever I am embraced by land and seascape I draw ideas for new sculptures; new forms to touch and walk around, new people to embrace, with an exactitude of form that those without sight can hold and realize...It is essentially practical and passionate.
  - *Studio International 171*– June 1966, p. 280
- The naturalness of life... the sense of community is, I think, a very important factor in an artist's life.
  - "A Pictorial Biography" (Tate Publishing, London, 1970)
- My left hand is my thinking hand. The right is only a motor hand. This holds the hammerThe left hand, the thinking hand, must be relaxed, sensitive. The rhythms of thought pass through the fingers and grip of this hand into the stone. It is also a listening hand. It listens for basic weaknesses or flaws in the stone; for the possibility or imminence of fractures.
  - "Barbara Hepworth: A Pictorial Autobiography" Bath, 1971, (extended edition published 1978 and subsequently reprinted in 1985 and 1993) p. 79



Hepworth, 1958: 'Ascending Form (Gloria)' bronze sculpture



Hepworth, 1958: 'Figure (Archaeon)', bronze sculpture; - quote of Barbara Hepworth, 1960: 'Light and space ... are the sculptor's materials as much as wood or stone ... I feel that I can relate my work more easily in the open air, to the climate and the landscape'

## 'Barbara Hepworth, A Pictorial autobiography', 1970

Quotes from: *Barbara Hepworth, A Pictorial autobiography* New York, Praeger Publishers, 1970

- All my early memories are of forms and shapes and textures. Moving through and over the West Riding landscape with my father in his car the hills were sculptures; the roads defined the forms. Above all, there was the sensation of moving physically over the contours of fountains and concavities, through hollows and over peaks – feeling, touching, seeing, through mind and hand and eye. This sensation has never left me. I, the sculptor, am the landscape. I am the form and I am the hollow the thrust and the contour
  - p. 280
- 'Circle' was published at last [constructivist manifesto, in 1937 - with Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson a.o.]. Mondrian has made his studio opposite so very beautiful, and his company was always inspiring, as it had been in Paris when we used to visit him. After a while he really seemed to our domestic scene. His studio and Ben's [the sculptor Ben Nicholson; Barbara was his wife then] were most austere, but my studio was a jumble of children, rocks, sculptures, trees, importunate flowers and washing.
  - p. 283
- We visited Meudon [c.1938] to see Hans Arp and though, to our disappointment, he was not there and his wife, Sofie Täuber showed us his studio. It was very quiet in the room so that one was aware of the movement in the forms...I thought of the poetic idea in [Hans] Arp's sculptures. I had never had any first-hand knowledge of the Dadaist movement, so that seeing his work for the first time freed me of many inhibitions and this helped me to see the figure in landscape with new eyes... Perhaps in freeing himself from material demands his idea transcended all possible limitations. I began to imagine the earth rising and becoming human.
  - p. 283
- Our sense of touch is a fundamental sensibility which comes into action at birth – our stereognostic sense – the ability to feel weight and form and assess its significance. The form which have had special meaning for me since childhood have been the standing form (which is the translation of my feelings towards the human being standing in the landscape) the two forms (which is the tender relation of one living thing besides another); and the closed form, such as the oval, spherical or pierced form (sometimes incorporating colour) which translates for me the association and meaning of gesture in landscape; in the repose of say a mother and child....In all these shapes the translation of what one feels about man and nature must be conveyed by the sculptor in terms of mass, inner tension, and rhythm, scale in relation to our human size and the quality of surface which speaks through our hands and eyes.
  - p. 284
- In my search for these values I like to work both realistically and abstractly. In my drawing and painting I turn from one to the other as a necessity or impulse and not because of a preconceived design of action. When drawing what I see I am usually most conscious of the underlying principle of abstract form in human beings and their relationship one to the other. In making my abstract drawings I am most often aware of those human values which dominate the structure and meaning of abstract forms. Sculpture is the fusion of these two attitudes and I like to be free as to the degree of abstraction and realism in carving. The dominant feeling will always be the love of humanity and nature; and the love of sculpture for itself.
  - p. 285
- Working in the abstract way seems to release one's personality and sharpen the perceptions so that in the observation of humanity or landscape it is the wholeness of inner intention which moves one so profoundly. The components fall into place and one is no longer aware of the detail except as the necessary significance of



Hepworth, 1960's: 'Sphere with Inner Form', bronze sculpture; - quote of Hepworth, 1952: *'There is an inside and an outside to every form. When they are in special accord....then I am most drawn to the effect of light. Every shadow cast by the sun from an ever-varying angle reveals the harmony of the inside to outside.'*



Hepworth, 1962-63: 'Oval form (Trezion)', bronze sculpture; - quote of Barbara Hepworth, 1946: *'I have always been interested in oval or ovoid shapes... Gradually my interest grew in more abstract values – the weight, poise and curvature of the ovoid as a basic form'*



wholeness and unity. ...a rhythm of form which has its roots in earth but reaches outwards towards the unknown experiences of the future. The thought underlying this form is, for me, the delicate balance the spirit of man maintains between his knowledge and the laws of the universe.

- p. 286

## 'Art Talk, conversations with 15 woman artists', (1975)

**Quotes of Barbara Hepworth, from: *Art Talk, conversations with 15 woman artists*, Cindy Nemser, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1995**



Hepworth, 1963: 'Sphere with Inner Form', bronze sculpture

- I loved the family and everything to do with them. I loved the environment and the cooking. I used to cook and go in my studio. I had to have methods of working. If I was in the middle of a work and the oven burned or the children called for me, I used to make an arrangement with music, records, or poetry so that when I went back to the studio, I picked up where I left off. I enjoyed it, you see; it was part of me.

- p. 14

- I have to dedicate myself. Do you understand? I don't feel conflict in myself because if I do, my work doesn't go well. If there's conflict I have to sit down or go to sleep to solve it. And the only way to solve the problem is to produce really affirmative work which can only come – I can't make it come. I can't conjure it up. I can only go to sleep and hope it happens... You have to digest it and if you digest you can contribute.

- p. 15

- I've found opposition to my teaching because I said it's not the strength which does it, it's a rhythm. You don't need huge muscles great strength. In fact, if you have that and misuse it, you're going to damage the material. It's absurd. It's a rhythmical flow of an idea, whichever sex you are.

- p. 15

- At no point do I wish to be in conflict with any man or masculine thought. It doesn't enter my consciousness. I think art is anonymous. It's not competitive with men. It's a complementary contribution. I've said that and I do believe it, that one does contribute to art and that's nothing to do with being male or female... I don't think a good work of art can just be said to be feminine or masculine... art's either good or isn't.

- pp. 15-16

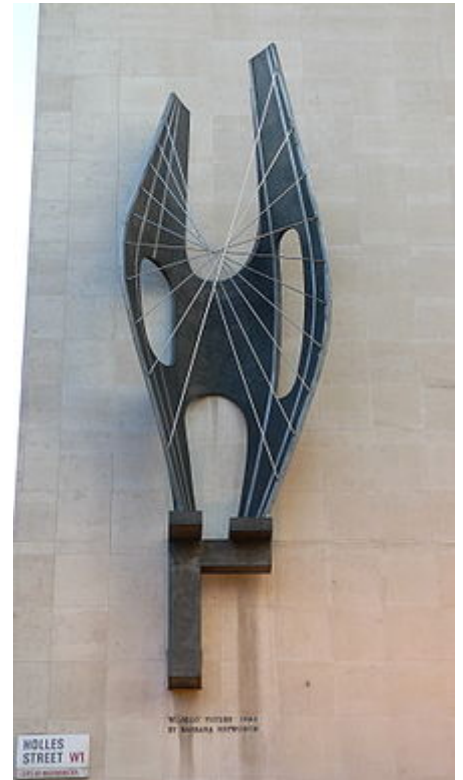
- It's [the art-magazine 'Circle'] been reprinted and it's now referred to as classic. ~~W~~ it is. But w: Ben Nicholson, Sir Leslie Martin, Gabo and Leslie Martin's wife, Sadie Speaight, and I did that. ~~W~~ were sitting round the fire and we said, 'Why shouldn't we do a book?'. And so we started and now it's a classic and referred to as such.

- p. 17

- There is an oval sculpture of 1943. I was in despair because my youngest daughter, one of the triplets, had osteomyelitis. In those days the war was on and you couldn't get anything. She was ill for four years. I thought the only thing I can do to help this awful situation, because we never knew if it would worsen, is to make some beautiful object. Something as clean as I can make it as a kind of present for her. It's happened again and again. When my son died, he was killed [in the war], it's the only way I can go on.

- p. 19

- You can't make a sculpture, in my opinion, without involving your body. You move and you feel and you breathe and you touch. The spectator is the same. His body is involved too. If it's a sculpture he has to first of all sense gravity. He's got two feet. Then he must walk and move and use his eyes and this is a great involvement. Then if a form goes in like that – what are those holes for? One is physically involved and this is sculpture. It's not architecture. It's rhythm and dance and everything. It's do with swimming and movement and air and sea and all our well-being.



Hepworth, 1963: 'Winged Figure', mural sculpture

Sculpture is involved in the body living in the spirit or the spirit living in the body, whichever way you like to put it.

- p. 21

- I think all these new sculptors [after World War 2.] – he Anthony Caro is not all that young though – are taking stand against abominable architecture since the war and I think rightly so. But again I feel it's not enough to be against something. You have to do something that will damn well replace it. Where do you put these sculptures?..I like to think that time is timeless and I wouldn't want to make a work which wouldn't last for more than ten years – nor a work that wouldn't go anywhere. It would make me terrible mad. Mind you, I have to wait to find for my work. It doesn't happen all that easily but it does happen. It slips in somewhere. Before the war the architects were very much one with the sculptors, painters, everybody We thought alike. Then the war was over.. ..the architects gave up coming to look at sculpture and painting.

- p. 22

- I'm involved in everything. I read just as I was in the thirties during the Spanish War and Franco and everything. And after all there's not a great deal of difference between the 'Monument to the Spanish War', a group of things one on top of the other that I lost and 'The family of Man', [Hepworth made in 1970]. I mean I've always been involved. I was involved in industry in my home town. I was involved in the distress and the strikes. I wasn't marching but I was involved through my work.

- p. 23

- One of the mysteries is how the human mind can hear a piece of music, a symphony from the beginning to the end, before beginning; or see a sculpture finished all the way round, when it doesn't exist. Now these faculties are the sort faculties which are needed in sciences, math, and medicine and all kind of things. But if one has them, one has to learn to use them.. .You can't start with a block and say: 'Now it's going to dictate me'. You [the artist] dictate to it.

- pp. 24-25

## Quotes about Barbara Hepworth

sorted chronologically after date of the quotes about Barbara Hepworth

- When the Surrealist exhibition [in London, 1936] was held Barbara was by then married to [the sculptor] Ben Nicholson, they were strongly against it [Surrealism], though I felt, and feel, that there needn't be the sort of division in art that sprang up then. And Ben had also been much influenced by Mondrian. He was devoted to abstract art and she became much more interested in the abstract form. But for me, the essence of sculpture has always been the human figure. Still, of course, one kept in touch and one met and one's paths crossed.
  - Quote of Henry Moore, in 'The Sunday Times', 25 May 1975; as cited in *Henry Moore writings and Conversations*, ed. Alan Wilkinson, University of California Press, California 2002, p. 121
- Hepworth's work truly resides in abstract forms. Her sculptures throughout her life maintained a primordial, almost prehistoric Brancusian egg-reference, with the near constant presence of the hole. Hepworth was quoted as saying, 'The pierced hole allows bodily entry and re-entry'.
  - Quote of Bram Hammacher, in *Barbara Hepworth*, 2nd ed. New York: Thames and Hudson, (1987), p. 98
- She had her first child in the summer of 1929, and her triplets in the autumn of 1934, and shortly afterwards began to make her first really abstract work. It is through her 'Mother & Child' carvings [she started c. 1935], that Barbara Hepworth began to work out her tendency to pierce the stone and to group pieces in relation to each other in many ways the removal of stone at the center of the figure...seem integrally bound up with the development of the hole in modern sculpture.



Hepworth, 1964: 'Rock Form (Porthcurno)'



Hepworth, c. 1964-65: 'Square Forms with Circles', bronze sculpture

- Quote in 'Hepworth', in the *Dictionary of Women Artists: Artists, J - Z*, ed. Delia Gaze, p. 672, Taylor & Francis, 1997
- The comparisons and contrasts between these two artists [Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth] are astounding. They went to the same schools, were part of the same artist movements like the 'Seven and Five Society' and 'Unit One', they spent summer holidays together - Henry Moore even lived in one of Barbara Hepworth's old houses after she had moved to the country. The influence between the two, whether conscious or subconscious, cannot be denied. The discrepancies of who did what first [piercing the stone / making a hole] feels insignificant when you consider all they have done in reflection of each other
- Quote of Lori Brookhart-Schervish, in 'Hepworth & Moore - Piercing Holes, Shaping Space' 22 Jan, 2011, see [1](#)

## External links

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- [selected sculptures of Barbara Hepworth](#)
- [texts about Barbara Hepworth](#)
- [sourced quotes from her own writings](#)



Hepworth, 1965: 'Dual Form', bronze sculpture



Hepworth, 1966: 'Construction (Crucifixion): Homage to Piet Mondrian', bronze and painted sculpture





Hepworth, 1966: 'Spring', bronze sculpture and wire



Hepworth, 1969: 'Two Forms' - (Divided Circle), bronze sculpture

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